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Ministry of Education

LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

VICTORIA – The Province introduced legislation today that will help improve student achievement by making school boards more accountable for student results, providing students and parents with more choice, and increasing support to school districts.

"This legislation provides students and parents with more choice and makes school boards more accountable so that more B.C. students graduate," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "While B.C. schools are among the best in the world, results have levelled off and in some cases have even declined, and we want to do better."

Under Bill 20, the Province will replace district accountability contracts with achievement contracts in which school boards will be required to set specific goals for student achievement. Boards will also be responsible in their achievement contracts for achieving specific results for Aboriginal students.

To help boards reach their performance goals, the Province will create new superintendents of achievement, who will support districts to improve student achievement and develop leadership at the district level. Four superintendents of achievement will report and make recommendations on improving student achievement, early learning and literacy programs in school districts. If boards do not reach their achievement goals, the minister may provide direction on how to achieve the goals.

The legislation also builds on the Province's new literacy plan, ReadNow BC, by broadening the mandate of school boards to include early learning and by requiring boards to develop district literacy plans to improve reading skills. School boards will be renamed "boards of education" to reflect their broader mandate.

"This legislation will help address the fact that nearly one out of four B.C. kindergarten students is not developmentally ready to start school," said Bond. "I'm encouraged that many school boards are already taking an active role in improving pre-reading levels for preschool children through the StrongStart early learning centres. This legislation builds on that work."

The Province will also provide increased support for parents who are dissatisfied with a board ruling, such as the suspension of a student. Parents will be able to appeal the ruling to the superintendents of achievement. If the superintendents decide the appeal should proceed, a mediator or adjudicator will be appointed to rule on the appeal.

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In addition, the legislation will broaden the Minister's capacity to consider creating provincial demonstration schools. The schools will provide students and parents with more choice and help B.C. develop the best educational practices that can then be shared with other schools throughout the province. Legislation will also expand the role of the district superintendent of schools to include responsibility for student achievement in the district.

The legislation fulfils a throne speech commitment introduce reforms that focus on improving quality, choice and accountability. The legislation supports the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda by helping to improve results for Aboriginal students and by improving B.C.'s competitiveness and productivity through education. It also helps the Province reach its goal of making B.C. the most educated, literate jurisdiction in North America by 2010.

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Media contact: Lara Perzoff
Public Affairs Bureau
Ministry of Education
250 356-5963
250 920-9040 (cell)

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